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ABSTRACT

Home-school visits, as one part of a program of home-school-community relations, have three primary benefits: they familiarize parents and other members of the community with the school's program, they aid school staff members in understanding the socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds of their students, and they identify potential community resources. A secondary benefit is that the visits increase community members' sense that the school and its staff are accessible. Home-school visits are not designed to take the place of parent-teacher conferences, which usually focus on the progress of a particular student. The visits are intended to cover a much broader range of topics that pertain to the school's activities and role. These visits can be either with individuals or with groups. Although the communications skills required for group meetings and for individual meetings are different, certain aspects of the process are the same. In both cases planning, the process of the meetings, follow-up procedures, and training programs must take place. It is important to be aware of the differences between meeting in the school and meeting somewhere else in the community. (Author/IRT)

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Simformation 3

Home ⇔ school visits

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FOREWORD

Since 1973, the Home-School-Community Relations Project at the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning has been involved in research related to the establishment of a supportive, meaningful relationship among the home, school, and community. Support and cooperation, which lead to optimal child growth and development, can exist when two conditions are met:

1. the staff of a school is aware of and responsive to the educational expectations and available resources of the community; and

2. the community is aware of and responsive to the instructional expectations and the program being implemented at the school.

Schools become involved in many activities directed at creating good relationships among the home, school, and community. Unfortunately, these activities are often unrelated and unfocused. By establishing a home-school-community relations program, rather than simply participating in a set of relatively isolated activities, a school can begin to develop a mutually supportive relationship among the home, school, and community.

There are four steps to creating a good home-school-community relations program. First, an analysis of the present state of school-community relations must be conducted. This analysis involves determining the issues or problems which exist and identifying those groups in the community which are associated with the issues. Second, the school staff must plan a program which is based upon the issues and groups that have been identified. This step includes planning a coordinated set of activities appropriate to the school community, identifying the personnel who will be responsible for carrying out various aspects of these activities, and setting timelines and procedures for the implementation of the program. The third step consists of implementing the program, and the final step is its evaluation. The program is evaluated by determining whether the appropriate activities, responsible personnel, and correct timelines and procedures were identified. This evaluation occurs both during and following implementation of the plan.

(continued on back cover)

SIMFORMATION 3

HOME ⟷ SCHOOL VISITS

by

Hillel I. Raskas

Report from the Project on
Home-School-Community Relations

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WISCONSIN RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT CENTER FOR COGNITIVE LEARNING

MISSION

The mission of the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning is to help learners develop as rapidly and effectively as possible their potential as human beings and as contributing members of society. The R&D Center is striving to fulfill this goal by

- conducting research to discover more about how children learn
- developing improved instructional strategies, processes and materials for school administrators, teachers, and children, and
- offering assistance to educators and citizens which will help transfer the outcomes of research and development into practice

PROGRAM

The activities of the Wisconsin R&D Center are organized around one unifying theme, Individually Guided Education.

FUNDING

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I

INTRODUCTION

People can communicate in many ways. They can send a letter, make a phone call, meet by chance, write a book, wave a hand, or sit down and talk. A home←→school visit is one activity in a home-school-community relations program in which people meet together to exchange information, to settle differences, and to participate in decision making. These visits provide for both individual and group contacts which allow people to talk and understand each other through direct, two-way communication. Consider these three problems:

> Imagine yourself a parent whose child has just come home from a busy day at school and is happily telling you about his day. Among other things, he mentions that Mr. Smith has punched his McBee card during the morning, he had lunch with Ms. Dyer, the new intern for the unit, and he was tested in the afternoon by Ms. Clark before joining a small group. Like most parents, you might be wondering who these people are and which of them is your child's real teacher. In fact, you might even be considering calling the school to learn what is happening. But whom do you call--Mr. Smith, Ms. Dyer, or Ms. Clark?

This is a problem from a parent's perspective. A group of teachers may have another concern:

> Because a housing development has just recently been completed, several new families have moved into the area and are sending their children to the school. One unit has a majority of these new students and the unit teachers are wondering how they can meet these parents. They know that one of the coming inservice days is allotted for unit use and they would like to plan an activity designed to answer questions these parents have about the school's program. Among suggestions that come up at a unit meeting are a special PTA meeting, a unit newsletter, conferences with individual parents as part of the pupil progress reporting program, and inviting the parents to visit the school for the day. However, the unit teachers would prefer to try something different. What should they do?

Finally, representatives of the school staff meeting with the principal have a larger problem to consider:

> The summer is drawing to a close and the school Instructional Improvement Committee (IIC) is spending the day at a unit leader's home having a barbecue and discussing some of the plans for the upcoming school year. The school principal, all the unit leaders, the volunteer coordinator, and the school nurse are present and the conversation has turned to the topic of how the school can improve its relationship with the school community. A number of suggestions are made by the teachers. Some suggest a newsletter, some a series of articles in the local paper, and still others suggest phone calls to interested citizens. After some discussion, the group realizes that they need to gain a better understanding of their surrounding community and must do so through personal interaction. How can this be done with a minimum of time lost from instructional activities and a maximum gain for all involved?

Home←→school visits, the topic of this simformation, provide one possible answer. The parent who wants to know a child's <u>real</u> teacher can call or visit the school some afternoon. The unit members who want to meet the new parents in a nearby housing development might try a group meeting either at the school or at the housing development. The IIC which is working to improve the school's relationship with the community might attempt a series of visits by IIC members to businesses and homes in the area to discuss the school's program and to solicit volunteers and resources for various school activities.

Home←→school visits are not designed to take the place of parent-teacher conferences or other home-school-community relations activities. In a conference, the primary goal is a systematic review of an individual student's academic growth and achievement. While the student may also be a central point of discussion in a visit, the intent of home←→school visits is to cover a broader range of topics. These topics could include

the plans for an addition to the school building, producing a school-community newsletter, or a decision to include new activities in the physical education program. As will be discussed, home↔school visits differ from conferences in their goals, benefits, and manner of operation. However, a program of home↔school visits may not be right for every school; clearly the program must be adapted to fit a particular situation.

There are three primary benefits to including a program of home↔school visits in a school's program of home-school-community relations: (1) to familiarize the parents and other members of the school community with the school's program, (2) to aid the school staff in understanding the socio-economic and cultural backgrounds of their students, and (3) to identify potential community resources. If members of the school community increase their interaction with the school, they can develop a better understanding of the school. Through a series of home↔school visits, teachers and other members of the school staff can gain information to help them design the school program to better meet the needs of their particular students. Thus, all associated with the school can gain from these activities.

A secondary benefit of a program of home↔school visits is that community members can increase their sense of the accessibility of the school and its staff. The fact that the school staff is willing to leave the building and venture out into the surrounding neighborhood or that the school staff invites parents and interested citizens to visit the school, suggests that the school staff is attempting to be responsive to the needs of the local school community and is actively seeking out their advice and assistance. Home↔school visits, combined with other selected activities, can result in an effective home-school-community relations program.

The investment of staff time in home⟷school visits can also be viewed in terms of the benefits to the students. Two major benefits can result from the school staff working with parents and other members of the community. First, their increased understanding of the students' background helps in the development of the instructional program. Second, their effort to meet with the school community demonstrates to students the school staff's commitment to their education and to the school. The result can be a more cooperative approach on the part of the students to the school staff and the school's educational program.

One problem that comes up in planning for home⟷school visits is that of time. In the normal school day there often is not enough time to complete all the tasks that are part of a total educational program. However, the need exists for those who work in the school to have a good relationship with those who are affected by the school. Support and understanding established during times when there is no crisis can be of invaluable assistance with a crisis does occur. Also, a program of home⟷school visits can be a good first step when a school or a school system wishes to begin planning a program of school-community relations. It may be necessary for the school administration to rethink current school practices of allocating time and to provide opportunities to develop a functioning home⟷school visits program.

The basic idea behind each type of visit is presented in the following sections along with some examples of actual programs. The problems of community analysis, reporting pupil progress, and conducting parent conferences are only briefly mentioned in this simformation. These topics are covered more completely in other simformations in this series.

II

MEETING WITH INDIVIDUALS

When a school staff member wants to meet with an individual member of the school community, the meeting can take place at one of three locations: (1) it can be held in the school, (2) it can be held at the individual's home or place of work, or (3) it can be held in some mutually agreed upon location like a coffee shop or a community center. The important point here is that the meeting is one-to-one. The staff member is not there to make a presentation, and the parent or community member does not have to compete with others. He or she is able to ask questions or raise concerns in private. In this chapter, critical factors which lead to effective communication are discussed; the areas of visit planning, process, follow-up, and training are reviewed; the key differences between meeting in the school and meeting in the home are summarized; and examples of actual programs are presented.

COMMUNICATION

When two people get together to have a conversation, they bring with them more than just what appears on the surface. Such factors as their education, previous experience, family background, and position in the school or community all affect the communication process. As the school staff begins to undertake a series of home←→school visits, it can be useful for them to consider certain concepts of communication. Among these are one-way/two-way communication, the style of communication, the need to establish trust and confidence, and the non-verbal aspects of communication including physical behavior, and the location of the visit.

Communication can be either one-way or two-way depending upon the manner in which feedback is allowed for and encouraged during the interaction. One-way communication occurs when print or electronic media (a newsletter or television announcement, for example) are used or when the reactions of the listener are not taken into account and allowed to modify the conversation (a presentation, for example). Some advantages of one-way communication are that it is more orderly, faster, easier for the sender, allows the sender to treat all listeners alike, and lets the sender maintain control over the situation. However, there are disadvantages to one-way communication: the absence of feedback can give the sender the false impression that things are going well, the listener must assume total responsibility for understanding the message, and misunderstanding and ambiguity can easily result.

Two-way communication results when the message or conversation is modified as a result of the reactions of one or both of the parties involved. Two-way communication allows the roles of listener and sender to shift back and forth and results in a mutual feedback loop. In addition the accuracy of communication can be checked and any intentions or nuances can be more easily understood. Other advantages are that information flows in both directions, both parties are forced to ensure that they are talking about the same thing, participation in the conversation is increased, and, when several persons are involved, a sense of group cohesiveness can result. There are also certain disadvantages to two-way communication: it is slower and less orderly, the sender is forced to be clear and consistent, and both parties must work harder to make it successful. Two-way communication is more typically utilized during home←→school visits.

When communication is initiated by a representative of the school, it should begin on a positive note. Typically the first personal communication a parent has with the school is a report of some misbehavior on the part of a child. If the first communication is an information-gathering visit by the school staff instead, a more positive approach can be taken. During a visit scheduled early in the year, a school staff member might begin by expressing the thought that the beginning of the term brings with it new experiences and opportunities for success. A good opportunity for a home←→school visit occurs when a parent enrolls a student during the course of the school year.

An important aspect of communication style is the language that is used. Often in education, school staff members pick up certain terms that have meaning to them but are confusing or not understandable to the public. A message or conversation that is full of such jargon serves no useful purpose if it is being directed toward people who are unfamiliar with the language. It may even create hostility. When communicating with people of different backgrounds, staff members need to select words that are clear and must not "talk down" to their listeners. If community members are avoiding the school because of a language problem, a special effort is necessary to bring about effective communication. Also, in some cases, the school staff may not understand the language of the community and a special effort must be made to remedy this.

During a one-to-one conversation, several types of information are exchanged between the persons involved. If a sense of trust and confidence is to be established, it is necessary for the school staff member

to distinguish among the various levels of information and treat them accordingly. Three identifiable levels are (1) strictly confidential information intended for the specific staff member, (2) confidential information to be shared only with appropriate staff members at the school, and (3) information which can be used relatively indiscriminately. For the school and its staff to be seen as a place where information can be brought and received with respect, staff members must not only recognize these three distinctions but also exhibit professional behavior which leads to a sense of trust.

In addition to the information that is transmitted through verbal communication, there is information that is sent through nonverbal behavior. If a staff member hesitates upon entering a parent's home where the lifestyle of the parent or the way in which a child interacts with his or her family during the visit is clearly alien to the visitor, his or her actions can communicate nonverbally as meaningfully as if actual negative words were used. Certain aspects of a person's behavior are also related to his or her cultural or ethnic background. Failure to recognize the existence of these differences may lead to an incorrect reading of attitudes or feelings. As part of the training process for home↔school visits, it would be useful for knowledgeable persons to discuss these differences with the school staff.

The existence of nonverbal behavior is also a consideration when the backgrounds of the school staff and the community are similar. The fact that a home↔school visit is a face-to-face situation requires the school staff member to be aware of the impression that he or she is making. The way one sits and the silent expression on one's face can mean as much as

the actual words that are being used. Even the amount of eye contact maintained during the course of a meeting can serve to relay how one feels about another person. The awareness of this point should help to guide the staff member's behavior.

While a visit should be a relatively informal situation, the staff member should not go unprepared. The need to speak from facts and not from opinion is important in establishing the tone of the visit. Although the conversation should be extemporaneous and on a friendly basis, this does not mean that the staff member should just "play it by ear." Rather, an attempt should be made to be prepared, to know why the meeting is taking place, to avoid the unnecessary creation of conflict, and to keep the visit on track and thus maximize the use of time.[1]

A distinction should be made between a visit with a parent and a visit with a nonparent. Although both parents and nonparents have certain common concerns about the school, differences in their orientation exist. In most cases, the concerns of parents center around their child's school life while the concerns of the nonparent are more likely related to general questions or specific issues. While both parents and nonparents may be involved with the same issues, having a child in the school has an effect upon the parent's priorities. This is true for all types of home↔school visits whether at school or at home, whether individual or group.

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[1]For further information on communication see: B. Dean Bowles and Marvin J. Fruth, "Improving Home-School-Community Relations," in The Principal and Individually Guided Education, eds. James M. Lipham and Marvin J. Fruth (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1976), pp. 163-199; Edward T. Hall, The Silent Language, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1959); C. David Mortensen, Communication: The Study of Human Interaction, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972); and Richard A. Schmuck and Philip J. Runkel, Handbook of Organization Development in Schools, (Palo Alto, CA: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1972).

PLANNING

The first step in setting up meetings with individual parents or community members is deciding who should be visited and for what purpose. Selection of parents or community members can be made by the principal, the unit leader, the IIC, or individual staff members. An attempt should be made to visit with as many persons as possible. In several school systems, new parents are visited during the summer by the principal so that registration forms can be distributed and questions can be answered. A parent or interested community member might request a meeting. Some individuals, especially those who serve as key sources of information for some segments of the community, might be selected for a visit as a means of providing them with accurate information about the school's program. Finally, those who have some unique resources that might be useful to the school might be visited in order to interest them in the school program.

When planning for a series of home←→school visits, it is necessary to identify the individuals or groups who will be involved and their specific tasks. The list below shows suggested roles and responsibilities for a program of home←→school visits:

Responsibility	Role
Planning	Principal Unit leaders
Coordinating	Principal One identified teacher or unit leader
Supporting	Central office Parent-teacher association/organization Parent-community advisory council
Implementing	Teachers
Evaluating	Principal Unit leaders Teachers

Parents and/or community representatives should be involved throughout the process to prevent errors in interpreting intent, to aid in establishing mutual priorities, and to act as a sounding board. Two-way communication should exist at all stages.

After an individual has been selected for a meeting, the next step is to contact the individual. One good way is to send an introductory letter, followed by a personal phone call. The letter serves to initiate the contact and should state that a phone call will be made to answer any questions and to arrange a meeting time. A notice in the school newsletter followed by a phone call or a phone call without an advance letter also works well. He or she might say, for example, that the meeting is seen as an opportunity for a school representative to meet with members of the school community to discuss mutual concerns about the school, its students, and its relationship to the community. Since this may be a new experience for both the staff member and the person who is being contacted, it is essential that the positive purpose of the visit be stressed.

It is important to be prepared for problems that may arise when the school tries to contact certain groups or individuals. Parents who have children with a history of school failure may be reluctant to have any further contact with the school. Community members who come from an ethnic or minority background different from that of the school staff may exhibit hesitation in coming to the school or working with school representatives. In such cases either a school or city agency staff member who has already gained access and acceptance in the community could aid in contacting individuals and explaining the purpose of the visit. A community

member or religious leader who has previously worked with the school might also be asked to assist with these efforts. While these persons may be seen as having been co-opted or owing allegiance to the school, an honest effort on the part of school staff members should result in success.

The visit should occur at a time convenient to both parties. In some communities, meetings may be held during school hours or in the late afternoon, while in other areas the early evening or weekends may provide the best times. It is recognized that school rules, union contracts, and other regulations may limit the time teachers and administrators spend outside of the school. One way of resolving this is to arrange for a second staff member or substitute teacher to cover the class of a teacher who is making a visit. Whatever the arrangements, it is important that both parties feel comfortable with the visit time.

If desired, a visit can be held with two staff members or with a staff member and a community liaison person. This is especially useful when both are closely associated with a special project or when one staff member is known to the community and the other is not. A staff member who has previously had positive experiences with either a particular home or particular group may serve to introduce another staff member. Having two staff members can sometimes help to make the visit more comfortable. However, sometimes a parent or community member may feel outnumbered and threatened by the presence of more than one school staff member. The best guide here is the staff member's own sense of the situation.

As an aid in preparing for a series of home←→school visits, a set of materials is included in Appendix A. The set includes sample invitations, letters of introduction, and suggested reporting forms for the school staff.

PROCESS

Once the meeting has been arranged, the next step is the visit itself. The first few visits that a school staff member makes, whether in the school or the home, are often the hardest because the experience is new. Often, the easiest way to start the visit is by introducing oneself and again explaining why the visit is being made. As described earlier, a home←→school visit might be arranged to discuss the school's program, to share knowledge about a particular student, or to meet about some specific issue. The usefulness of the visit can best be shown by stressing the increased understanding and cooperation that can occur when members of the school staff and community have an opportunity to mutually interact. It is worthwhile for the staff member to state why a parent or community member was chosen for a visit if the reason is not apparent. This should answer some of the questions that arise when the first contact is made.

After the reasons for the meeting are made clear and the introduction, the next step is accomplishing the objectives of the visit. It is here that a crucial part of the home←→school visit occurs--deciding what topics to cover. While the school staff member may want to proceed with his or her plan for the visit and discuss the school's program, the progress of an individual student, or a specific concern, the parent or community member should first be encouraged to bring up possible topics of discussion. If

the visit proceeds with only the staff member's topics, the possibility exists that certain problems or feelings will not be revealed.

The building of the agenda or plan of conversation for a home←→school visit should be a joint effort of both the staff and community member. Unlike a focused interview where the school staff member has a specific set of questions to ask, a visit should be run on a more open-ended basis. If the community member has no questions or concerns that immediately come to mind, a reaction to some aspect of the school program may be sought by the staff member. What is important is that the community member feel that he or she has a part in determining the visit's agenda.

Although it is difficult to predict how long a typical home←→school visit will run, thirty to sixty minutes should be set aside for a complete session. It should be remembered that a home←→school visit is neither a parent-teacher conference nor a depth interview. In a conference, the central theme is an individual student's progress, while a visit in intended to focus on a broader set of topics. Similarly, a visit should flow naturally from a non-directed conversation, while a depth interview works from a specific set of objectives. While certain ideas contained here apply equally to other types of interaction between the school and the community, a visit is simply an opportunity for extensive interaction with no expressed purpose of either extensive analysis or conferencing.

The final part of the visit consists of the concluding remarks and clarification of any promises made in the course of the visit. While the positive nature of the visit should be remembered by the staff member throughout the visit, it is essential that the visit finish with a feeling

that the experience has resulted in a gain of understanding and in mutual satisfaction. In order to maintain the credibility of the school, promises made during the visit should be realistic. When a school representative is not able to deliver on a commitment, the result can only be an increase in tension or conflict between the home or community and the school. After final questions or comments, the willingness of the parent or community member to participate in future home←→school visits should be determined.

FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

The staff member should send a short thank-you note immediately after the home visit. The message should express appreciation for the time taken for the visit and might include a comment about a particular positive incident or observation that occurred during the visit. The thank-you note is even more important when the visit has been tense or disagreement has arisen. This gesture, made by the school, may highlight the fact that courtesy and disagreement are not mutually exclusive.

The next step in the follow-up procedure is writing the report that describes the visit and identifies concerns or issues that were raised. One record that is made identifies who has been visited with, on what date, and by which staff member. A brief report of what transpired during the visit is helpful not only to the teacher(s) presently working with the children in the family, but also to those making future visits to the home. Writing a short report also helps the staff member to reflect on the visit and to clarify the major points of the discussion. The items to be covered in the report and the reasons for it may first be shared with the parent or community member.

Sharing information which was obtained in the visit must be considered from the standpoint of the individual who has been visited. As discussed earlier, some shared information can be distributed among all staff members, some should be available only to those who are involved with a particular situation, and some is intended only for the staff member who has actually made the visit. In order for both the staff member and the school to retain their credibility, the individual staff member must be able to make these distinctions. Here, the staff member's actions must be both professional and ethical to maintain further cooperation from the school community.

A second way to share information from a visit is a discussion of the experience itself. If a group of staff members are conducting a series of home←→school visits, the experience of one staff member can be useful to others who are planning to participate in the program. By comparing common aspects of their visits, without revealing confidential information, staff members can determine which techniques were most helpful in conducting the visit. This can help to increase the confidence of others who will be involved. (For further discussion on sharing information, see Simformation No. 4, School Administrator's Interview Handbook.)

A vital step in the follow-up process is to attempt to resolve those problems discovered during the visit. If this attempt is made, it should result in an increase in the school's perceived responsiveness. While no school program can meet all problems, it is important that realistic concerns be discussed and brought to the attention of staff members so that appropriate actions can be taken. If specific promises are made during the visit, it is the responsibility of the school staff member to see that they are kept and that all are kept informed.

An important part of the follow-up process is informing the community member of those actions that are being taken to resolve a problem or concern. When a promise is made by a school staff member that some item will be looked into, it is crucial that the community member be made aware of exactly what is taking place. This applies to both a favorable and unfavorable result. The responsibility to get back to the community member with a status report and to ensure that items transmitted for action are carried out should be clearly fixed. If community members know that they are being heard and that an attempt is made to resolve their problems or alleviate their concerns, the bond between the home or community and the school will be strengthened.

Finally, an evaluation of the home⟷school visits program should be periodically conducted by both the school staff and by community members. Each should consider whether the goals of the home⟷school visits program are being met and if they should be continued. Modifications in the program can be made based upon this ongoing review.

TRAINING PROGRAM

Before undertaking an extensive program of home⟷school visits, it is necessary to develop a training program that will aid the school staff in preparing for these visits. One activity that is frequently used is role playing. Assuming the role of either a staff member, parent, or community member can point out potential problems and alternative responses can be attempted before an actual situation occurs. This type of training works best in a small group with a leader who has had some

experience in the actual activity and is able to expose the group members to a variety of experiences. The group leader can come from either the school staff or from another agency which has a similar program such as the department of welfare or a visiting nurses group. An important part of this training is the discussion of possible problems and concerns that might arise. An experienced home visitor can lend invaluable assistance by suggesting alternative responses to a particular situation.

Along with the problem of finding time for the home↔school visits program, additional time is needed for the training sessions and the follow-up procedures. An excellent source for this time is the inservice or released time periods scheduled during the school year. If a strong argument can be made in support of these activities as a vital part of the school program, it may be possible to replace participating teachers with other teachers, substitutes, or instructional aides during these activities. While this may be hard to arrange, the potential benefits of the program can serve as a basis for obtaining the necessary support for its implementation.

The concepts of communication covered earlier in this section are an important part of the training program. A good training program includes discussion of the differences between one-way and two-way communication, the style of communication, the need to establish trust and confidence, and the non-verbal aspects of communication. A teacher, another staff member, or an outside consultant trained in communication could assist with this. It is important to remember that both the parent or community member and the school staff member have important contributions to make during the visit and that both should be heard.

DIFFERENCES: COMMUNITY AND SCHOOL

The differences inherent in meeting in the parent's or community member's home and in the school building itself should be evident. When a school staff member ventures out the door, he or she is leaving the familiar confines of the school and is entering another person's territory. Similarly, the parent or community member who comes to the school for a visit may feel that he or she is entering a new and potentially threatening place. In the discussion that follows, some of these differences are identified and examples of specific programs are mentioned.

Visiting in the Community

Most frequently, parents and community members who wished to interact with the school staff have had to go to the school. The idea that a principal, teacher, or other staff member would take the time to leave the school for the express purpose of meeting with members of the school community may be new to both school people and community members. However, the result of the school actively pursuing an "out-the-door" policy can be a feeling on the part of the school community that the school is now accessible to them.

Often, the most difficult part of preparing for a home visit is wondering what will be talked about and not knowing what might occur. This can be overcome by careful planning. Specifically, the home visitor should be prepared to discuss the school's program and the individual student's progress in the program if appropriate. A school handbook can be brought along and left at the home. If the visit is entered into with a positive attitude and a sense that a greater understanding of both

parties will result, it will be a success. Included as Appendix B are suggestions for school handbooks. These can serve as a useful means for putting together information about the school for parents and community members.

A typical forty-five minute home←→school visit might go as follows:

5 minutes	Introductory remarks Explanation of the visit's purpose Reasons why the person was selected for a visit
30 minutes	Identification of the concerns, issues, problems, and questions of the individual Description of the school's program Answering questions
5 minutes	Solicitation of support for the school's program Request for volunteer or other resource assistance
5 minutes	Concluding remarks Expression of thanks for time spent in visit Assurance that contact will be maintained and suggestion that school be called if any further needs arise

One problem that should be considered before making a visit is the existence of cultural or lifestyle differences that may pose some initial difficulty. Although these differences may also affect a visit by a parent or community member to the school, they are generally more acute when a staff member leaves the relative security of the school building and enters into unfamiliar territory. Two points should be stressed as part of the inservice or training program: (1) the visitor should obtain advance information about the neighborhood by reading relevant documents, being briefed by social service workers, or meeting with community representatives, and (2) the visitor must understand that not all people pursue their lives in the same way. Staff members should be knowledgeable about specific problems that exist in their school community.

It is recognized that in certain areas, conducting home↔school visits may involve physical risk on the part of the school staff. Here, visits might be made by two staff members or with a community member. While this and similar considerations should be taken into account, they should not deter the school staff from attempting to improve the relationship between the home, school, and community. Possibly, an intensive home↔school visits program will reduce the risk factor by strengthening the ties between the school and the community.

Examples

During the summer months a school that has an ongoing program of home↔school visits could have the principal and other members of the staff visit homes in the area. These school staff members may register students for the upcoming school year and at the same time give the parents the opportunity to meet a member of the school staff and have their questions answered.

In place of teachers or administrators visiting homes, some schools have a program of home visitors who are drawn from the community itself. Training sessions on both the school's program and on visiting are given. These individuals then serve as a liaison between the school and the community. As they are often the neighbors of those whom they visit, they are able to talk with them and convey community concerns back to the school. Various research studies have shown that using community members as home visitors improves communication and increases mutual understanding among various groups associated with the school community.

A follow-through program that is in operation in several communities consists of having community members and/or paraprofessionals assist in parent-education programs. After a training process, these individuals

visit the homes of pre-school or kindergarten children and help parents to prepare their children for formal schooling. Games and techniques can be demonstrated which parents can use in teaching their children various skills. This program can also be useful for parents of elementary school children.

The Teacher/Advisor (T/A) program used in many schools provides an excellent opportunity for a home visit. In this program, every student has one school staff member who acts as his or her advisor--sometimes for several years. This presents an obvious opportunity for a home ⟷ school visit between the parents and the teacher-advisor and a good chance to extablish a close link between the home and the school.[2]

Visiting at the School

A parent or community member may visit the school by invitation, for a specific reason, or just to see what is happening within the brick walls. It is important that the school staff prepare for these visits and especially so when it is a first visit. The first impression obtained by the visitor upon entering the school can serve to affect the remainder of the visit and the impressions that are carried away and eventually shared with other school-community members. When an attempt is made to see the school from the perspective of a parent or community member, the importance of the visit can be appreciated.

The visit of a parent or community member to the school can be divided into the first impressions--obtained upon approaching and entering the

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[2]For information on the Teacher/Advisor program see: Keigh H. Hubel, Paul Tillquist, Robert Riedel, and Charles Myrbach, The Teacher/Advisor System, (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1974) and Keigh H. Hubel, The Teacher/Advisor System in Action, (Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co., 1976).

school--and the actual meeting or visit itself. Although many of the points covered earlier in this section apply here, a major difference may result because the parent or community member is not on neutral or familiar ground.

A person entering the school grounds first notices the area surrounding the school and the entrance. A cheerful sign of welcome or a closed cold corridor can make a difference in how he or she initially feels. The pictures on the walls should be appropriate to the season and the community. Greeting from a passing teacher or student and an offer of guidance can serve to convey a sense of welcome and openness.

The visitor's trip through the halls can be cheered by signs that both lead the way to a central point and offer a greeting. Usually, a visitor would begin at the school office. Recognition by an office employee, staff member, or student can aid in the welcome. Prompt attention to a visitor suggests that the school is eager to have school-community members come to the school and see it in operation.

The school secretary, custodial staff, and hallway monitors can also convey an important first impression to a school visitor. They should be included in the training program and should understand that they are an integral part of the school staff.

The reason for the visit should be determined soon after the visitor reaches the office. Is it a parent who wants to visit a child's teacher? Is it a store owner who has a complaint about student behavior? Or is it a newcomer to the city who is visiting several schools prior to buying a house? When the purpose of the visit is established, the appropriate response can then be made, whether it is a tour of the school building or a private

meeting with an individual teacher. In any event, the school should have a designated person, usually a member of the building administration, who is prepared to handle this task.

While the appropriate staff member is being reached the visitor may be offered a copy of the school handbook (see Appendix B). If there is time the visitor may be taken to see an exhibit of current student work. This exhibit should be changed frequently and should be considered an important part of the impression the school makes on visitors.

If there is no specific purpose for the visit, the staff member can spend some time discussing the organization of the school, its various instructional programs, future plans, and other aspects of its operation, along with other topics of interest to the visitor. The concepts of communication discussed earlier also apply in this situation. It is important that the visitor and the staff member talk with each other in a common language. The follow-up procedures of record keeping and information sharing apply here also.

The second half of a visit can consist of a tour of the school and, possibly, a visit to a class. In some schools, older students are assigned the task of showing a visitor around the building after the conversation with the staff member. Before this is done, students should participate in a training program which emphasizes their position as representatives of the school. The experience can be meaningful to both the visitor and the student since it allows the student to demonstrate knowledge of the school and increase his or her pride in it. The tour should conclude in the school office so that any last questions can be answered, misunderstandings clari-

fied, and additional information provided. Finally, the school staff member should express thanks to the visitor for taking the time to come to the school and meet with the staff.

When planning for visits, it is important that the school staff consider the point of view of the visitor. If the school is seen as being open to visitors and they are made to feel welcome, a positive start has been made toward a fruitful visit. While the routine of the school should not be disrupted by the presence of a visitor, the school should accommodate itself to possible visits.

Examples

One way parents can easily be invited to visit the school is through an extension of the home-phone program. If parents are called on a regular basis by teachers to let them know how their children are doing in school, they could also be invited to visit the school and see their children at work. Each teacher could invite one parent every two weeks to come to the school for a short visit. Then, a majority of parents would visit the school during the course of the school year in addition to any conferences needed.

In some schools, a hot lunch program for senior citizens exists in tandem with the school lunch program. As these individuals are already in the school building, one or two could be invited on a regular basis to come earlier or remain later to visit the school. With a minimum of effort, this could lead to a highly successful experience as well as provide a source of school volunteers.

If businesses exist close to the school grounds, merchants or store workers could be asked to visit classes and discuss their work. This

form of visit combines using a resource person and providing an opportunity for a school visit.

Several suggestions made by a Wisconsin principal include: (1) the use of school facilities at night to bring people into the building and let them know that it is their school, (2) parents with expertise in a subject being taught visiting a class, (3) the school parent-teacher association or organization encouraging a school-visit program, and (4) a breakfast offered several times a year for those community members unable to visit the school at other times.

School staff members could attend meetings of community groups, fraternal organizations, or church auxiliaries and extend an open invitation to visit the school. Besides adding to the concept of the school as a valuable part of the community, the presence of school staff members at community meetings serves as another tie between the school and community. If the school staff members are a part of community life, then they in turn will bring the community into the school.

III

MEETING WITH GROUPS

The old line, "two's company but three's a crowd," applies also to home↔school visits. When a school staff member meets with more than a few parents or community members, a different set of dynamics operates as the group takes on characteristics of its own. In this section, certain factors associated with group meetings are discussed; the areas of planning, process, follow-up, and training are reviewed; the differences in meeting in the community or in the school are considered; and examples of actual programs are presented. The earlier discussion of communication and individual home↔school visits applies here, although the group situation necessitates some changes.

GROUP MEETINGS

The dynamics or forces that come into play when a group of people meet together depends both upon the subject under discussion and the degree of diversity in the group membership. The purpose of a group may also vary greatly. It may be a social meeting, an exchange of information, or an urgent attempt to attain a crucial goal. When looking at the interaction that results from a group meeting, certain concepts may be useful. Among these are the basic nature of groups, the existence of conflict, the effect of the school representative upon the group, and the amount of feedback and involvement possible during a group meeting.

The basic nature of any group is dependent upon two major variables: (1) the background of the individual group members and (2) the group experience itself. This first variable concerns the differences that exist

among group members in such areas as education, ethnic/cultural heritage, socioeconomic status, experience in working with a group, and familiarity with other group members. The second variable relates directly to the group process. The existence of conflict or group cohesiveness can only come about through the interaction of group members. Often, a viewpoint that is offered by one person is supported (or argued against) by other group members. When a schcol staff member is preparing to work with a group, it is important for him or her to remember that a group may have a life of its own that can not be predicted from the backgrounds of the individual group members.

The school staff member often brings items for discussion or for action by the group members to a meeting. This agenda or plan may not be the only one that is present. Individual group members may possess their own lists of priorities and these may differ from the staff member's. These priorities may be readily apparent to all or they may exist on a deeper level and only become evident as the meeting progresses. While the possibility of conflict exists, it is not to be feared but rather seen as an opportunity to bring certain issues out into the open. This in turn may allow for a certain creative tension to develop which may bring with it alternative solutions to a problem. Regardless of the problem-solving process used, conflict is frequently a part of group work, and, as such, school staff members should be prepared for its occurrence.

Whether speaking before a luncheon group of senior citizens at a community center or moderating a discussion of parents during an evening meeting at the school, the school staff member is perceived by the group

as being both himself or herself and the official representative of the school. In some situations, staff members may be called upon to present the school's official policy, provide the answers to a complex problem, or face the brunt of a group's anger. The presence of a staff member in a group setting also affects the group process if the staff member is an outsider to the group. To work effectively with a group, the staff member should be aware of the possible effect his or her presence and actions during a meeting can have upon the group.

Although two-way communication is more likely during a one-to-one meeting, it is also possible during a group meeting. The feedback or reaction that a group gives to the school staff member through either questions and statements or through nonverbal behavior, such as posture and degree of attentiveness, should be used to guide the course of a presentation or meeting. The extent to which group members are able to be involved in the discussion or planning can add to their satisfaction with the meeting. If the group members are to feel that the experience is more than an information session, provisions for interaction between the group and the school staff member are necessary. These should be encouraged and sought by both the group and the staff member. A greater sense of the importance of the meeting can be achieved if parents or community members play an active part.

PLANNING

Planning for a group visit is similar to planning for a one-to-one visit, and many of the previous comments apply. The key differences are in selecting the group and locating the visit site. Several types of

groups can be identified that may be interested in a group visit either in the school or in another location. Among these are civic groups, fraternal organizations, a neighborhood "kaffeeklatsch," the parents of children in one unit, and individual community members who are interested in the school. As part of the preparation for a group visit, the school staff should determine the primary purpose for the group's existence: Is it organized around a common issue? Is it school oriented? Is it a social group? Or does it exist only for the purpose of the visit? The answer to these questions should guide the school staff in approaching the visit.

One way to look at a group is the factor that either unites the group or is common to potential group members. For example, a meeting might be held for parents of kindergarten-age children in the late spring to introduce their children's future teachers. Or parents and other community members new to the neighborhood might gather to tour the school and learn about its programs. A group of people may also have a common ethnic or cultural heritage and so may want to be recognized by the school. Finally, community members concerned about a specific aspect of the school program like sex education or bilingual education might require a series of meetings with school officials. It should be remembered that people can gather together in many ways and can be a part of several groups.

The group visit can occur in many places. Using the school building has both advantages and disadvantages. While the building is the most convenient location for the staff and can be used at any time, it is also seen as belonging to the school and may not be comfortable to some members of the community. Outside of the school, meetings can take place in a

community building or in a private home. A church assembly room, a labor hall, a civic room in a shopping center, or a factory cafeteria are all possibilities. Holding the meetings in various parts of the school neighborhood can enable different people to participate.

A private home offers an excellent alternative to using a community building for a group visit. Perhaps the most common of this type of visit is that of the coffee group or "kaffeeklatsch." This is an informal social gathering, held in one person's home, to which the school principal and/or other staff members are invited to discuss the school's program and to answer questions about it. In some communities, the "kaffeeklatsch" is a regular activity and is held in different areas on a rotating basis. Depending upon the community, it could be held in the morning, in the afternoon, or in the early evening.

As one way to aid in finding a location for the meeting, the school might offer to supply the refreshments in exchange for the use of a home. This could be a project of a particular class or school club. A second arrangement might be for one person to provide a meeting place, while others share in providing the refreshments. When many people participate in the preparations, increased attendance will result. The main concern is making the experience appropriate to the community. If attendance and participation are to be encouraged, the type of gathering must relate to the type of community.

In deciding where to hold a group visit, the most important factor in all cases is that the place chosen be comfortable for all who wish to attend. If this means that it is necessary for the school staff to venture out into the community, then they should seriously consider it.

PROCESS

There are several approaches that a staff member can take when conducting a group visit. The visit can begin with a formal presentation about the school or a specific program, new staff members can be introduced, or a question and answer period can follow a few short comments. It is helpful to discuss beforehand those concerns of the group which are most evident. This preparation can aid in making the meeting beneficial to both the school and the community.

The first part of a group visit consists of introductory remarks which should serve to set the tone for the remainder of the meeting. Here, the staff member should state who he or she is and identify other staff members who are present. Although the staff member may have a set agenda or plan in mind, it is useful here to ask: "What would you like to talk about?" This opens the discussion to consideration of concerns that may have been unknown to the school.

The main body of the visit varies from group to group. A discussion may take place, information may be offered, or action may be planned for a future activity. What is important is that the meeting be geared to the needs of the group as well as the needs of the school staff. Even though a program has been planned, it should be left open to modification if the tone of the group indicates that a discussion session would be more appropriate.

An alternative form of group meeting is for a member of the school community to assume a leadership role. Whether in a private home, a neighborhood center, or in the school building, it is possible for the meeting to be organized and conducted by a community member. Here, the school staff member may either answer questions or act as a resource person to the group.

One advantage to this method is that a greater sense of purpose may develop when the discussion leader emerges from the group itself.

The final part of a group visit consists of the closing remarks and summary of the meeting. The school staff member should summarize the high points of the presentation or discussion and offer closure to the meeting. After a planning session, it is worthwhile for the staff member to remind the participants of any individual tasks they have accepted. If the visit has been primarily informational, the staff member should make it clear that the school is willing to answer future questions. This may be coupled with a request for community assistance in a school volunteer program or for community help with future activities. In all cases, the meeting should include an expression of thanks to the parents or community members for taking the time to meet with the school representative.

One problem that can arise at a group meeting occurs when an individual group member attempts to monopolize the discussion around one particular concern or incident. The school staff member is caught between the need to consider the individual's concern and the desire to discuss common problems. Avoiding a response to the questions of one individual should not appear to be an attempt to sidestep a tough issue. The speaker may either suggest an individual meeting or use the questions to start a discussion on what may be the crucial issues for the community. Whatever technique is used, it is important that the speaker be prepared for this problem and plan some action that can aid the presentation.

FOLLOW-UP PROCEDURES

The follow-up procedures after a group visit are similar to those for an individual visit. Thank-you notes should be sent. A written report should be prepared on both the content of the meeting and the experience itself for group members and others who may be involved in future meetings.

The understanding obtained through these visits should be demonstrated in both immediate and future modifications of the school's program. The school should implement any suggestion that was made in the course of the discussion that is seen as both beneficial to the school and possible. For example, the principal might write a newsletter to the staff describing special events that are planned for the community and suggest that these be pointed out to the students. When a suggestion is made that has value but cannot be immediately used, one possible option is to appoint a parent-community-school staff study group. A committee to discuss the school's reporting system and examine alternative systems is an example. In either case, it is important that the school staff demonstrate that serious suggestions will be given serious consideration and be implemted if feasible.

A necessary aspect of the follow-up procedures for a group visit is informing the group of what has happened to their suggestions or complaints. In addition to taking some action on a request, the school staff has a responsibility to maintain contact with a group in order to let them know that they have been heard. If a promise has been made that some action will be taken, it is important that the group be kept informed of both the progress of the action and the end result. Whether it is favorable or not, keeping

a group informed should only help to further strengthen the bond between the group members and the school.

As with individual visits, both school staff and community members should evaluate the meeting. It is important that evaluation occur both during and at the end of a series of group visits. In this way, the program can be improved before the end of the school year.

TRAINING PROGRAM

The development of a training program for meetings with groups should concentrate on three basic concepts: (1) communication, (2) group dynamics, and (3) the differing background of the involved groups. In seeking out resource people for this training program, members of the school staff, local university instructors, or representatives from community agencies may be helpful. These individuals should be made aware of the purposes for home↔school visits and should direct their efforts toward accomplishing that end.

As the school staff prepares for a series of meetings with groups, they should consider how these visits affect the school's relations with the various members of the school community. It should be pointed out to the staff during the training program that home↔school visits are only one part of a home-school-community relations program and that other activities will still be conducted. Before the activity is begun, the effect that it may have on the school's future relations with the community should be discussed.

DIFFERENCES: SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

Many of the differences between meeting in the school building or meeting in the community are similar to those discussed in the previous

section. In the discussion that follows, specific differences are identified and examples of specific programs are mentioned.

Meeting in the Community

The informal atmosphere that can exist in a small group which meets outside the school building can be useful to both the school and the community. This is a good time for a principal or staff member to become acquainted with the school community. If meetings are held on a regular basis, parents and community members have the assurance that a member of the school staff is easily available to answer questions or to explain a misunderstanding.

An advantage to visiting a group outside of the school that is similar to a visit in the home is that it indicates that the school staff desires to be responsive to the needs of the school community. The willingness of school staff members to leave the school grounds and seek out concerned community members will demonstrate the desire of the school to encourage greater interaction between all members of the school community. This attempt on the school's part to carry the word of its program outside the school and to be available to discuss common concerns and expectations can serve to aid both the school and the community.

Examples

A school that has a volunteer program may start a set of "kaffeeklatsch" groups by having aides who live in the neighborhood open their homes for a meeting. Either the school principal or a teacher could attend for a short time and be introduced to the aide's neighbors.

In a community where many individuals work in shops that are close to the school, a school official could arrange to meet with these indivi-

duals for coffee before work or at a designated time. This could be arranged on a regular basis and serve as a reliable source of information for the community.

A staff member who is also a member of a fraternal or civic organization may organize a "what's happening at the school" session for one of the meetings. Here, several school members could be available to answer questions and discuss various school projects. An opportunity to solicit needed resources might arise at this time.

If the community is involved during the week with either work or other activities, the school staff may be required to arrange meetings for the weekends. A Saturday or Sunday afternoon may be the only time that some community members are available to meet with school representatives. An attempt to meet at times that are convenient for community members is an important part of a successful home←→school visits program.

Meeting in the School

The final type of home←→school visit is the one that is most common in schools throughout the country. Groups of parents or other community members often visit the school during American Education Week, near a school holiday, or for a special event. However, community members can (and should) be invited to the school throughout the school year. Remember to consider school visits from the viewpoint of the parent or community member.

Before considering some examples of group visits that take place in school, a distinction should be drawn between group visits as discussed here and meetings of the school parent-teacher organization. While simi-

larities do exist, parent-teacher organization meetings are generally held around a central theme or topic and may be seen as being part of a national and state-wide organization. Group visits that are a part of a home←→school visits program are more open to a general discussion or are organized as needed to discuss a specific concern. Parent-teacher organization meetings can serve a useful purpose, but should not be seen as being a school's total program of home-school-community relations. Rather, they should be one component and should be accompanied by many other activities including home←→school visits.

Examples

Several schools which have an Individually Guided Education (IGE) program have parents meet by units on different nights. In this way the meetings are reasonably small and the parents are better able to understand the concept of a unit. Consider the possibility of a potluck dinner with this smaller group.

One school individualizes its discussion groups. Visitors can study what they like and in a manner in which they are comfortable. The possibilities include talking with a teacher, seeing a videotape, watching a class, or participating in an activity. Thus, visitors can gain an appreciation of the program.

As many school-community members are not able to come to school during school hours or at night, some schools hold early morning coffees. Members of the school staff meet with community members before the work day begins. The availability of key administrators is a consideration for this activity.

In a major school visits program recently conducted by one community, twenty visiting committees composed of parents and other school-community members were established. Over a three-day period, town citizens examined the school program and gained first-hand information from teachers, students, and administrators. Based upon the visits and a series of prepared statements by the school staff on the philosophy, curriculum, and organization of the school, the group made recommendations to the school board. The activity involved a total community in examining its schools.

A discussion of groups visiting the school would not be complete without consideration of unexpected visits by school-community groups. Visits by taxpayer groups, concerned parents, or community organizations are a possibility in some areas and are best met with an attitude of openness. The manner in which the group is received at the first meeting will affect future relationships with the group.

IV

CONCLUSION

Throughout this discussion, home⟷school visits have been suggested as an activity through which increased mutual understanding and support can be achieved among the various groups and individuals that comprise a school community. A home⟷school visits program is not meant to be a total program of home-school-community relations. Rather, it is one set of activities which can be an important component of a complete program.

The steps for creating a good home-school-community relations program have been described. These include a needs assessment, program planning, implementation, and program evaluation. As these steps are carried out, it is important to remember also the guidelines of (1) total school staff involvement, (2) school-community involvement by all associated with the school, and (3) the development of a program of home-school-community relations which goes beyond good two-way communication to include participation in decision-making, involvement of time and resources, and resolution of potential or existing problems.

Home⟷school visits have their limitations and may not be useful in all situations. Problems may arise when meeting with either individuals or with groups. Perhaps the most common situation that might be encountered when arranging a meeting with an individual is the "reluctant person." This

is the person who never comes to the school when invited and expresses no interest in meeting with a school staff member. Here, a special effort must be made to counter any objections. A child's favorite teacher may call a parent or a community worker may serve as an intermediary. The fact that the meeting is for a positive purpose should be stressed throughout the efforts that are being made.

At a group meeting, the most common problem is that of the "axe-grinder," the person who has a particular concern or is simply looking for conflict. Among the options open to the staff member are to suggest an individual meeting at a later date, use the complaint to open a general discussion, or allow group members to persuade the person to stop disrupting the meeting. If the disruptive person is acting as an individual, the speaker needs to balance the need to hear the person out with the obligation to the group to continue the meeting. When the group itself is disruptive, school staff members should be prepared to defend their programs or be willing to work together to resolve any differences. As conflict rises, the problem may require conflict resolution techniques that fall outside of normal home↔school visits.

The use of other techniques may be necessary to resolve increasing or intense conflict. Among these are an appeal to a higher authority, use of the established grievance mechanism, or resort to direct political action. In any case, one should consider the participants, their goals and intensity of purpose, and the extent and type of policy difference. Whether the outcome is consensus, cooperation, coalition, or conflict, disagreement may continue to persist.

Home↔school visits are one means to increase the interaction between the home, school, and community and may be a helpful addition to a school's program of home-school-community relations.

APPENDIX A

MATERIALS FOR HOME↔SCHOOL VISITS

(Notification of Home-Visit Program)
(Individual Letter)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones:

The Green Valley Elementary School has begun a program of home-visits this year. In order to acquaint members of the school community with our program, several school staff members have decided to meet with community members on an individual basis.

The purpose of these visits is for the staff member to describe the school program and to answer any questions that you have about the school. The visit will take no more than one hour and will be arranged at a time that is convenient for you.

Within the next two weeks, Pat Hill, one of our teachers, will contact you. If you have any questions about the program, either Pat or I will be glad to answer them.

Cordially,

Lee Smith

Lee Smith
Principal
Green Valley Elementary School

(Thank You Note)
(Home Visit)

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Jones:

I just want to thank you for taking the time to visit with me last Tuesday morning. The comments you made about the school program were very interesting and I hope that I was able to answer your questions.

Cordially,

Pat Hill

Pat Hill
Second Grade Teacher
Green Valley Elementary School

(Group Visit Invitation)
(School Visit)

Dear Friend:

The Green Valley Elementary School would like to invite you to visit us next week during American Education Week. On Tuesday evening, April 4th, the school will be open from 6:30 p.m. until 9:30 p.m. Teachers will be in their rooms and will be glad to show you what their classes are doing. At 8:30 p.m., a short program of songs and folk dances will be presented by the students and refreshments will be available afterwards.

We hope you will come and visit us.

Cordially,

Lee Smith
Principal
Green Valley Elementary School

(Group Visit Invitation)
(Community Visit)

Dear Friend:

I have been invited to speak at the next meeting of the Green Valley Luncheon Club which meets in the community center on Crown Street. I will be speaking at 1:00 p.m. on Monday, October 17th. You may come for lunch at noon or by 1:00 if you wish to hear my talk.

My topic will be: What's New at Your School? I hope that you will be able to join us.

Cordially,

Lee Smith
Principal
Green Valley Elementary School

Home ◄—► School Visits
Report Form

Name of individual or group _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Contact person _____

School staff member(s) _____

_____

Where did visit take place?

Who initiated the visit?

What were the major topics of discussion?

Positive remarks?

Negative remarks?

Is any further action necessary? Has a follow-up contact been made?

Additional comments? Are there any restrictions to this information?

REMEMBER: ONLY SHARE THAT INFORMATION THAT THE COMMUNITY MEMBER WANTS TO HAVE SHARED!

APPENDIX B

SCHOOL HANDBOOKS

Educating and Communicating with Parents: Publishing Handbooks

by

Ann Murray

A brochure or handbook about a school can benefit students, parents, staff and newcomers. If available at the opening of school, such items as a list of staff names with room numbers, and a map of the school, can be most helpful, along with a brief description of goals and programs. In contrast to newsletters published more frequently, a handbook should be durable enough to last throughout the year as a handy reference.

1. What's In A School Handbook?

All or some of the following items may be included, depending on the number of pages in the handbook:

A. Principal's name and telephone number of the school.
B. Staff names and room numbers.
C. Map of the school building.
D. The school calendar.
E. Names and telephone numbers of superintendent, subject coordinators, and school committee.
F. School regulations concerning absences, tardiness, etc.
G. Principal's message.
H. Statement of school's educational philosophy and policy.
I. Explanation of specific programs (math, reading, learning disability, etc.).
J. Parent involvement opportunities.
K. School's unique features (a learning lab, open classroom, portable classroom).

2. Who Writes and Edits the Handbook?

Ideally, this is a joint endeavor of principal, staff, and interested parents.

3. How is the Handbook Published?

As with a newsletter, the school's clerical staff or parents may assume the publishing responsibilities. Another option is to have the handbook commercially printed, although expense and length of time required may be a drawback.

4. What is the Format of a Handbook?

Handbooks most commonly are a "handy" size, with pages approximately 4 and 1/2 by 5 and 1/2. If a handbook is not commercially printed, front and back covers can be made out of colored construction paper with perhaps a drawing of the school on the front (or a cover design can be chosen from a contest among students). A handbook with more than 8 pages should include a table of contents.

The simplest form of school brochure consists of 9 by 12 inch paper, folder in half to make a pamphlet. The principal's name and school telephone number can be included on the front; the staff and parent representatives' names and a map can appear on the inside pages; and the school calendar and central office telephone numbers can be printed on the back.

SOURCE: Ann Murray, Parent Power in the Schools. 1974.
Merrimack Education Center
101 Mill Road
Chelmsford, Massachusetts 01824

In considering the activities which will help solve existing problems, it is essential that the school staff consider the following guidelines:

1. The entire school needs to be involved in creating good home-school-community relations. Teachers, aides, students, and parents, as well as the principal, must be involved in the home-school-community relations program;

2. The entire community must also be involved in creating good home-school-community relations. The school community includes more than the parents of students at the school. Senior citizens, business people, parochial school parents, and parents of preschoolers are important members of the school community;

3. Good home-school-community relations include more than mere communication with the school community. Good two-way communication between the community and the school is essential, but it is not sufficient. The creation of a supportive relationship requires community participation in decision-making, community involvement of time and resources in the school program, and resolution of school-community problems which exist.

A series of simformations designed to provide practical, hands-on materials to improve home-school-community relations are being developed by the R & D Center's Home-School-Community Relations Project. There are six simformations in the current series:

Simformation 1: Introducing Parents to the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development

Simformation 2: A Guide to Organizing a Volunteer Program in IGE Schools

Simformation 3: Home-School Visits

Simformation 4: School Administrator's Interview Handbook

Simformation 5: Reporting Pupil Progress

Simformation 6: Parent-Teacher Conferences

These may be obtained from the CCL Document Service, 1025 West Johnson Street, Madison, Wisconsin 53706.

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